

**From:** lmuntz  
**To:** Microsoft ATR  
**Date:** 12/15/01 5:46pm  
**Subject:** Microsoft attitude toward intellectual property

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I am a doctoral candidate in English at the University of Iowa and serve as a teaching assistant at UI and at Mt. Mercy College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The temptation that essay-for-sale-or-trade websites offer to undergrads is quite strong and offers a constant battle for those of us who wish to prevent plagiarism and teach our students how to perform rigorous, honest intellectual work.

The publication of the following article on Microsoft's website Slate undermines such attempts. For a corporation that portrays itself as concerned about intellectual property rights and about making the Internet a learning tool for students, the promulgation of such an article on-line by MSN indicates at the least a faulty editorial policy and at most an arrogance about or negligence in enacting the corporation's policies and missions, in my opinion.

I appreciate having this venue by which to comment.

Lori Muntz

>===== Original Message From <lori-muntz@uiowa.edu> =====  
shopping  
Adventures in Cheating  
A guide to buying term papers online.  
By Seth Stevenson  
Posted Tuesday, December 11, 2001, at 11:04 AM PT

Illustration by Nina Frenkel  
Students, your semester is almost over. This fall, did you find yourself pulling many bong hits but few all-nighters? Absorbing much Schlitz but little Nietzsche? Attending Arizona State University? If the answer is yes to any or (especially) all these questions, you will no doubt be plagiarizing your term papers.

Good for you-we're all short on time these days. Yes, it's ethically blah blah blah to cheat on a term paper blah. The question is: How do you do it right? For example, the chump move is to find some library book and copy big hunks out of it. No good: You still have to walk to the library, find a decent book, and link the hunks together with your own awful prose. Instead, why not just click on a term paper Web site and buy the whole damn paper already written by some smart dude? Que bella! Ah, but which site?

I shopped at several online term paper stores to determine where best to spend your cheating dollar. After selecting papers on topics in history, psychology, and biology, I had each paper graded by one of my judges. These were: Slate writer David Greenberg, who teaches history at Columbia; my dad, who teaches psychology at the University of Rhode Island (sometimes smeared as the ASU of the East); and my girlfriend, who was a teaching assistant in biology at Duke (where she says cheating was quite common). So, which site wins for the best combination of price and paper quality? I compared free sites, sites that sell "pre-written papers," and a site that writes custom papers to your specifications.

#### Free Sites

A quick Web search turns up dozens of sites filled with free term papers. Some ask you to donate one of your own papers in exchange, but most don't. I chose one from each of our fields for comparison and soon found that when it comes to free papers, you get just about what you pay for.

EssaysFree.com: From this site I chose a history paper titled "The Infamous Watergate Scandal." Bad choice. This paper had no thesis, no

argument, random capitalization, and bizarre spell-checking errors-including "taking the whiteness stand" (witness) and "the registration of Nixon" (resignation). My judge said if they gave F's at Columbia, well . Instead, it gets a good old "Please come see me."

BigNerds.com: Of the free bio paper I chose from this site, my judge said, "Disturbing. I am still disturbed." It indeed read less like a term paper than a deranged manifesto. Rambling for 11 single-spaced pages and ostensibly on evolutionary theory, it somehow made reference to Lamarck, Sol Invictus, and "the blanket of a superficial American Dream." Meanwhile, it garbled its basic explanation of population genetics. Grade: "I would not give this a grade so much as suggest tutoring, a change in majors, some sort of counseling ."

OPPapers.com: This site fared much better. A paper titled "Critically Evaluate Erikson's Psychosocial Theory" spelled Erikson's name wrong in the first sentence, yet still won a C+/B- from my dad. It hit most of the important points-the problem was no analysis. And the citations all came from textbooks, not real sources. Oddly, this paper also used British spellings ("behaviour") for no apparent reason. But all in all not terrible, considering it was free. OPPapers.com, purely on style points, was my favorite site. The name comes from an old hip-hop song ("You down with O-P-P?" meaning other people's ... genitalia), the site has pictures of coed babes, and one paper in the psych section was simply the phrase "I wanna bang Angelina Jolie" typed over and over again for several pages. Hey, whaddaya want for free?

#### Sites Selling Pre-Written Papers

There are dozens of these-I narrowed it down to three sites that seemed fairly reputable and were stocked with a wide selection. (In general, the selection offered on pay sites was 10 times bigger than at the free ones.) Each pay site posted clear disclaimers that you're not to pass off these papers as your own work. Sure you're not.

AcademicTermPapers.com: This site charged \$7 per page, and I ordered "The Paranoia Behind Watergate" for \$35. Well worth it. My history judge gave it the highest grade of all the papers he saw-a B or maybe even a B+. Why? It boasted an actual argument. A few passages, however, might set off his plagiarism radar (or "pladar"). They show almost too thorough a command of the literature.

My other purchase here was a \$49 bio paper titled "The Species Concept." Despite appearing in the bio section of the site, this paper seemed to be for a philosophy class. Of course, no way to know that until after you've bought it (the pay sites give you just the title and a very brief synopsis of each paper). My judge would grade this a C- in an intro bio class, as its conclusion was "utterly meaningless," and it tossed around "airy" philosophies without actually understanding the species concept at all.

#### Illustration by Nina Frenkel

PaperStore.net: For about \$10 per page, I ordered two papers from the Paper Store, which is also BuyPapers.com and AllPapers.com. For \$50.23, I bought "Personality Theory: Freud and Erikson," by one Dr. P. McCabe (the only credited author on any of these papers. As best I can tell, the global stock of papers for sale is mostly actual undergrad stuff with a few items by hired guns thrown in). The writing style here was oddly mixed, with bad paraphrasing of textbooks-which is normal for a freshman-side by side with surprisingly clever and polished observations. Grade: a solid B.

My other Paper Store paper was "Typical Assumptions of Kin Selection," bought for \$40.38. Again, a pretty good buy. It was well-written, accurate, and occasionally even thoughtful. My bio judge would give it a B in a freshman class. Possible pladar ping: The writer seemed to imply

that some of his ideas stemmed from a personal chat with a noted biologist. But overall, the Paper Store earned its pay.

AlTermpaper.com (aka 1-800-Termpaper.com): In some ways this is the strangest site, as most of the papers for sale were written between 1978 and '83. I would guess this is an old term paper source, which has recently made the jump to the Web. From its history section, I bought a book report on Garry Wills' Nixon Agonistes for \$44.75, plus a \$7.45 fee for scanning all the pages-the paper was written in 1981, no doubt on a typewriter. Quality? It understood the book but made no critique-a high-school paper. My judge would give it a D.

I next bought "Personality as Seen by Erikson, Mead, and Freud" from Al Termpaper for \$62.65 plus a \$10.43 scanning fee. Also written in 1981, this one had the most stylish prose of any psych paper and the most sophisticated thesis, but it was riddled with factual errors. For instance, it got Freud's psychosexual stages completely mixed up and even added some that don't exist (the correct progression is oral-anal-phallic-latency-genital, as if you didn't know). Showing its age, it cited a textbook from 1968 and nothing from after '69 (and no, that's not another Freudian stage, gutter-mind). Grade: Dad gave it a C+. In the end, Al Termpaper.com was pricey, outdated, and not a good buy.

With all these pre-written papers, though, it occurred to me that a smart but horribly lazy student could choose to put his effort into editing instead of researching and writing: Buy a mediocre paper that's done the legwork, then whip it into shape by improving the writing and adding some carefully chosen details. Not a bad strategy.

#### Papers Made To Order

PaperMasters.com: My final buy was a custom-made paper written to my specifications. Lots of sites do this, for between \$17 and \$20 per page. PaperMasters.com claims all its writers have "at least one Master's Degree" and charges \$17.95 per page. I typed this request (posing as a professor's assignment, copied verbatim) into its Web order form: "A 4-page term paper on David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest. Investigate the semiotics of the 'addicted gaze' as represented by the mysterious film of the book's title. Possible topics to address include nihilism, figurative transgenering, the culture of entertainment, and the concept of 'infinite gestation.' "

This assignment was total hooley. It made no sense whatsoever. Yet it differed little from papers I was assigned as an undergrad English major at Brown.

After a few tries (one woman at the 800 number told me they were extremely busy), my assignment was accepted by Paper Masters, with a deadline for one week later. Keep in mind, Infinite Jest is an 1,100-page novel (including byzantine footnotes), and it took me almost a month to read even though I was completely engrossed by it. In short, there's no way anyone could 1) finish the book in time; and 2) write anything coherent that addressed the assignment.

I began to feel guilty. Some poor writer somewhere was plowing through this tome, then concocting a meaningless mishmash of words simply to fill four pages and satisfy the bizarre whims of a solitary, heartless taskmaster (me). But then I realized this is exactly what I did for all four years of college-and I paid them for the privilege!

When the custom paper came back, it was all I'd dreamed. Representative sentence: "The novel's diverse characters demonstrate both individually and collectively the fixations and obsessions that bind humanity to the pitfalls of reality and provide a fertile groundwork for the semiotic explanation of addictive behavior." Tripe. The paper had no thesis and in fact had no body-not one sentence actually advanced a cogent idea. I'm guessing it would have gotten a C+ at Brown-maybe even a B-. (Click

here to read the rest of the paper.) If I were a just slightly lesser person, I might be tempted by this service. One custom paper off the Web: \$71.80. Not having to dredge up pointless poppycock for some po-mo obsessed, overrated lit-crit professor: priceless.

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Infinite Jest

Introduction

Wallace's fictional narrative *Infinite Jest* is an epic approach to the solicitous and addictive nature of humanity. The novel's diverse characters demonstrate both individually and collectively the fixations and obsessions that bind humanity to the pitfalls of reality and provide a fertile groundwork for the semiotic explanation of addictive behavior. Although Wallace may have actualized the concept of the "addicted gaze" to the literal or physical response to the viewing of Incandenza's coveted film the Entertainment [*Infinite Jest*], it is manifested symbolically throughout the novel in the distractions of its characters.

Nihilism

It would appear that Wallace has chosen society's most frequently rejected and denounced individuals as the vehicle for the narrative search for and preservation of the ultimate fix, which is illustrated by the obsession for Incandenza's film. At the same time and despite their diversity and distinctions, these individuals will ultimately represent the inextricable and covert characteristics of nihilistic behavior.

School-aged malcontents, drug addicts and the physically challenged all attempt to get a hold of a copy of the film and experience its pleasures at any cost. Ironically, it was the film maker James Incandenza's habit to regularly observe the depravation of Boston's crowded street milieus, where "everyone goes nuts and mills, either switching or watching" (620). It is not surprising therefore that he should develop a film that would be perceived as the panacea to the entertainment addictions of the masses.

Figurative Transgendering

Wallace devotes a substantial amount of space to the illustration of the contradictions of gender, where the adoption of gender behavior or symbols contrary to the character's true gender can be analyzed. The occasion of Hugh Steeply in drag as he met with Marathe to discuss the emergence of the Entertainment's cartridge may have served the literal purpose of the agent arriving incognito however his devotion to applying feminine mannerisms appear to go above and beyond the call of duty (90). In spite of his practice, Marathe nevertheless describes Steely's appearance as "less like a woman than a twisted parody of womanhood" (93).

Wallace also presents the steroid-driven objectives of a number of the female tennis player's like Ann Kittenplan. "who at twelve-and-a-half looks like a Belorussian shot putter" (330). It may be fair to assume that their desire to acquire a manly physique is not entirely confined to the advantages it offers on the tennis court. In his notes, Wallace suggests that the "gratification of pretty much every physical need is

either taken care of or prohibited" by the tennis academy (984). Clearly, the administration of steroids or any other drug of choice is prohibited by the ETA considering the wide scale purchase of "clean" urine for the academy's drug testing.

#### An Endless Jest

Perhaps the most significant example of the addicted gaze is demonstrated not so much in the stationary and fixated attention to satisfying one's obsession but in the demand for the continuous pursuit of it. The halfway house/rehab center, Ennet House, represents the often ineffectual and delusional pursuit of ridding oneself of addiction. A clear example of the deceptive environment of rehab is demonstrated by Lenz's use of cocaine while at the facility. For many of the residents like Lenz, the limitations at Ennet House are often so unbearable that its residents are driven to the use of drugs in order to preserve their sanity. Ironically, Lenz's stash of cocaine works as a contrived temptation that undermines any true potential for ridding himself of his addiction.

#### Conclusion

Wallace's Infinite Jest is a chaotic amalgam of humanity and the similarly depraved behaviors that they demonstrate in the pursuit of amusement and satisfaction. Although the restrictions to their attainment are clearly represented by the physical entities of the Academy, the Ennet House and the wheelchair, they are also fostered by them.

If Incandenza's "Accomplice" is any indication of the content of the Entertainment, it only reinforces the contention that human nature includes the inherent desire to not only view the depravity and debauchery of human behavior but even more, to participate in it. There is little to ponder why so many of Wallace's characters must depend on their mind and body altering drugs of choice, if not to influence how they are viewed by others then at the very least to make more palatable their own perceptions of self.

John L.'s monologue delivered at one of the AA meetings illustrates the destructive implications of either reasoning: "all the masks come off and you all of a sudden see the Disease as it really is. and see what owns you, what's become what you are -" (347).

#### References

Nihilism. The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. [online] Available: <http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/n/nihilism.htm>.

Wallace, David Foster. Infinite Jest. New York: Little, Brown & Co., 1996.

for future reference